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MONITORING OF INTERNATIONAL PLANS AND PROGRAMMES OF ACTION

Current status of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 47/237 on the International Year of the Family

Note by the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. The International Year of the Family was observed in 1994 in accordance with General Assembly resolution 44/82. One plenary meeting at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly, on 7 December 1993, was devoted to a formal launching of the Year, in accordance with Assembly resolution 47/237. The meeting was addressed by the President of the Assembly, the Secretary-General and a representative of the host country, as well as by representatives of the countries that hosted the four regional preparatory meetings for the Year, held during 1993 at Tunis; Valletta, Malta; Beijing; and Cartagena, Colombia. A brief segment for non-governmental organizations was also held in connection with the Assembly's launching of the Year.

2. In its resolution 47/237, the Assembly recommended to Governments, policy-making organs of specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system, and to the Commission on Human Rights, the Population Commission and the Commission on the Status of Women, various activities to follow-up the International Year of the Family.

3. It also decided that, beginning in 1994, 15 May of every year should be observed as the International Day of Families. On 15 May 1994 the first International Day of Families was observed all over the world, using the theme and logo of the Year. Preparations are under way for the observance of the second International Day of Families, with the theme, "Tolerance begins in the family", in view of the proclamation of 1995 as the United Nations Year for Tolerance.

4. The General Assembly further decided to devote two plenary meetings at its forty-ninth session, in 1994, to the implementation of the follow-up to the Year and to designate those meetings as an international conference on families, which should take place at an appropriate global policy-making level and in keeping with the procedures and practices of the General Assembly. Also in the same resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of States members of the Commission for Social Development on the desirability of working out a declaration on the role, responsibilities and rights of families on the occasion of the Year, to report on the observance of the Year at the national, regional and international levels, and to submit specific proposals on the follow-up to the Year, including a draft plan of action, if deemed appropriate, to the Assembly at its fiftieth session.

I. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FAMILIES

5. Pursuant to its decision, the General Assembly met on 18 and 19 October 1994, in four plenary meetings, as an International Conference on Families. Following statements by the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, 45 delegations took the floor, 20 of which were represented at the ministerial level or equivalent. A brief segment for non-governmental organizations also took place as part of the Conference, in recognition of the contributions that voluntary and grass-roots organizations made to the Year.

6. The Conference marked the first time that the General Assembly devoted its plenary sessions exclusively to discussion of the topic of families. Many speakers reaffirmed the importance of families to understanding and addressing a range of social issues; most recognized the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society. Some stated that what was traditionally seen as a private matter, in a number of respects, had now been recognized as a public social policy concern. Participants reviewed the status of activities in observance of the Year and several noted that it had placed family issues on the social agenda as a legitimate concern of social policy. Some speakers stated that by focusing on family concerns policy makers could develop an approach to social development which would synthesize and integrate diverse issues. This was underscored by the experience of many countries, where observance of the Year had led to greater realization of interdisciplinary and multisectoral programmes for social development. Many countries had realized that policies to promote democratic families and family-friendly societies were often in the best interest of individuals and society. A recurrent conclusion was that observance of the Year had confirmed the need for universal ratification and implementation of human rights instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

7. Many speakers referred to the connection between the substantive concerns of the Year and those of the various recent United Nations conferences concerned with environment, human rights and population, as well as the forthcoming conferences on social development, women and housing. Reference was made to the need for adequate reflection of family issues in the relevant documentation for forthcoming conferences, in particular for the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. The important contribution non-governmental organizations could make to continuing national and international efforts on behalf of families was recognized.

8. Attention was drawn by many speakers to the negative impact of poverty and unemployment on families. Additionally, various areas of importance to families were identified, including the need to ensure tolerance and human rights, reduce domestic violence and provide basic services such as education and health care; efforts to achieve gender equality, to encourage sharing of domestic responsibilities and a strengthened role for fathers, and to enable a better balance between work and family responsibilities; programmes to assist families in need, including single-parent families, especially those headed by women, and families taking care of dependent members, including children and young people and disabled or older family members; protection for families during times of transition, including those brought about by economic or demographic changes or migration; and assistance to families suffering because of war.

9. Some speakers mentioned the need for continued attention within the United Nations system to family issues. The value of regional and international cooperation was underscored, as was the need for technical assistance to developing countries and those with economies in transition to strengthen programmes for families. Some delegations supported a long-term plan of follow-up action, a proclamation of a decade of families and elaboration of a declaration on the rights and responsibilities of families.

II. SUGGESTIONS REGARDING A DECLARATION ON THE ROLE, RESPONSIBILITIES AND RIGHTS OF FAMILIES

10. A note verbale was addressed to the 32 States members of the Commission for Social Development seeking their views on the desirability of working out a declaration on the role, responsibilities and rights of families. Eight responses were received.

11. Belarus supported the elaboration of a declaration. Chile responded that many elements of the text of the Declaration of Cartagena, adopted by the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Meeting Preparatory to the International Year of the Family, held at Cartagena, Colombia from 9 to 14 August 1993, could be used for the elaboration of a declaration. Cyprus suggested that the Commission for Social Development could undertake the preparation of a draft declaration to be submitted to Member States for comment. Germany considered that the Guiding Principles on the Family, elaborated by the Vienna Non-Governmental Organizations Committee on the Family, was a useful basis for a declaration, provided Member States agreed to accept them as a working paper for drafting purposes. The Philippines pointed out the need for a declaration to be integrative, covering all family members, in order to capture the essence of the family. The Russian Federation suggested following a procedure similar to that used in the case of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, that is, a draft should be examined by the Commission for Social Development and sent for approval to the Economic and Social Council. Sweden stated that it would first like a major effort to implement the existing instruments in the field of human rights, rather than initiating work on a new document. Ukraine supported the elaboration of a declaration.

III. SPECIFIC PROPOSALS ON THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE YEAR

12. The global observance of the International Year of the Family has affirmed the value of an integrated and systematic approach to family issues in the context of social development policy and suggested the desirability of continuing effective, long-term action at all levels following the Year. Pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in resolution 47/237, the Secretary-General will submit to it, at its fiftieth session, specific proposals regarding the follow-up to the Year in the form of a draft global blueprint for action on families.

13. The draft blueprint will constitute a synthesis of the proposals for specific actions that have emerged from the observance of the Year, in particular from national plans of action, as well as from the regional preparatory meetings for the Year, the International Conference on Families and the United Nations Interregional Meeting of National Coordinators/Focal Points for the International Year of the Family, held at Bratislava, Slovakia from 4 to 7 February 1995. Specific proposals will also be based on the consensus reached at each of the relevant recent global conferences, including the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit for Social Development. The approach that will be proposed will stress the value derived from focusing policies on family concerns as a means of synthesizing and integrating diverse development issues.

14. Pursuant to the approach adopted for the International Year of the Family, and bearing in mind the diversity of families and the socio-economic contexts in which they live, the draft blueprint will concentrate on actions to be taken at the local and national levels. If endorsed, the blueprint would be considered an indicative guide to suggest, promote and facilitate long-term action at all levels regarding families. Decisions regarding the relevance of the proposals in the blueprint and responsibility for taking specific actions would rest with each country, organization or other entity, as appropriate, taking into account the diversity of economic, social, cultural and political conditions, while respecting duly approved international instruments and standards in the field of human rights. Action to be proposed at the international level would be primarily supportive in nature and undertaken within the existing resources of existing institutions.

15. The United Nations Interregional Meeting of National Coordinators/Focal Points for the International Year of the Family discussed the national, regional and international follow-up to the Year and adopted specific recommendations and conclusions. The Meeting also undertook a preliminary exchange of views on a draft framework for a global blueprint for action on families.

16. In addition to the guidance provided by the relevant documentation already available, input and suggestions have been solicited by the Secretariat for the preparation of the draft blueprint. Contributions are also expected from the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, as well as from other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

17. On the basis of information collected from these sources, the format and content of a draft global blueprint for action will be developed for submission to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session. Various topics that have been mentioned for possible inclusion in the draft blueprint are listed in the annex below, organized under a number of headings.

Annex

POSSIBLE FORMAT AND CONTENT OF A DRAFT GLOBAL BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION ON FAMILIES

The draft global blueprint for action on families should consist of a preamble and guiding principles, followed by three sections: major concerns and goals; strengthening support for families; and long-term follow-up.

Topics that have been suggested for inclusion under the heading "major concerns and goals" are grouped below under four clusters, as follows:

Interrelationship between family well-being and sustainable development

Promoting human security through family security; integrating family well-being and development strategies; families, sustained economic growth and poverty; families and the environment; families and social integration.

Towards family-friendly societies

Public awareness; knowledge about families; family empowerment; family-impact consideration; improving family infrastructure; democracy, participation and subsidiarity; rights and responsibilities of families.

Building families based on partnership

Human rights and families as democratic units; rights of children and other vulnerable members of the family; gender equality in the family; changes in family organization: equal sharing of rights and responsibilities; combating human rights violations in families: domestic violence, abuse and neglect.

Promoting family strengths and providing for family needs

Reproduction, reproductive rights and family planning; child care and socialization; learning, education and transmission of culture; health, nutrition and food security; shelter and the living environment; employment and family supportive workplaces; poverty and low-income families; international and internal migration, urbanization and rural development; single-parent families; displaced and refugee families; indigenous and ethnic minority families; families facing personal crises; families and young persons; families and elderly members; disability and chronic illness; families and the HIV/AIDS epidemic; families, addiction and substance abuse; families, crime prevention and adolescent delinquency.

Under the heading "strengthening support for families", proposed actions would be arranged according to the principal actors concerned: national Governments; regional or local governments; the private sector; non-governmental organizations at different levels; research and academic institutions; the media. The supporting role of regional and international cooperation would also be indicated.